

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
FOI/PA
DELETED PAGE INFORMATION SHEET
FOI/PA# 1425502-0

Total Deleted Page(s) = 3
Page 8 ~ b6; b7C;
Page 10 ~ b6; b7C;
Page 14 ~ b6; b7C;

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(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

1-D
CHARLOTTE OBSERVER
Charlotte, N.C.

Date: 1/17/80

Edition:

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Title:

Character:

or

Classification:

Submitting Office: CE

Gaston Klan Official Charged In Cross Burning

By MARY NEWSOM
And WAYNE NICHOLAS
Observer Staff Writers

Diane Ingle, 32, and her husband, Edward, 38, were watching "The White Shadow" on television Tuesday night in the living room of their house near Boger City when she heard a car.

Mrs. Ingle said she looked out the front window and saw yellow, flickering lights reflecting off the house. Then she saw the burning cross.

Gaston County Ku Klux Klan leader Virgil Griffin and another Gaston man were arrested about a half-hour later in Lincolnton and charged in connection with the burning.

Griffin, 35, of Alexis, grand dragon of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, was charged with aiding and abetting in connection with the cross burning and reckless driving during a 3-mile chase before his arrest.

Mark Sherer, 19, of Cramerton was arrested and charged with burning a cross and possession of firearms by a felon. Sherer was free on parole on a 1977 armed robbery conviction in Mecklenburg County.

Griffin was released early Wednesday on \$5,000 bond. Sherer was in Lincoln County Jail Wednesday under \$6,500 bond. Trial for both men was set for Jan. 29.

When she saw the fire, Mrs. Ingle said, she yelled to her husband, "There's a cross burning in our yard," and the two ran outside and extinguished the fire with a garden hose.



Griffin

She said she had no idea why the cross was burned. "Maybe if I did, I could quit shaking," she said.

Mrs. Ingle added that she works with a Klan member at Lail Electric in Lincolnton, but said she couldn't remember making any anti-Klan remarks.

Officials said Wednesday they had found no motive for the cross burning.

The State Bureau of Investigation is investigating. Under state law, it is a felony to burn a cross on someone else's property. The maximum penalty is five years in prison.

The Ingles, who are white, noticed the burning cross about 8:30 p.m.

Lincoln County Sheriff Harven Crouse said off-duty prison guard E.C. Coffey saw two men running from the fire get into a 1973 Mercury Comet. Coffey followed the car and notified law enforcement officials with his CB radio.

Lincoln County sheriff's deputies and Lincolnton police arrested Griffin and Sherer at 8:55 p.m. at a roadblock in Lincolnton.

Lincolnton police Sgt. D.R. McGinnis said Wednesday that officers confiscated a .22-caliber rifle, a .44-caliber cap-and-ball pistol (a replica of a Colt pistol) and a 16-gauge shotgun from Sherer's car, which Griffin was driving.

McGinnis said all the guns had ammunition in them, and police found a box of shotgun shells. Police also confiscated several books, including one entitled "Hitler," and a Bible.

There were unconfirmed reports a 4½-foot-by-3-foot wooden cross, wrapped in partially burned, oil-soaked cloth, was also confiscated from the car. McGinnis and Crouse said they were not present when deputies searched the car.

Crouse said the sheriff's department took the cross from the Ingles's yard. It was green poplar, he said, with the bark still on the branches.

177-259-1

SEARCHED	INDEXED
SERIALIZED	
JAN 17 1980	
FBI - CHARLOTTE	

8/27/84 Sp2T/plah

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b7C

ADD 3 1980

FM - CHARLOTTE

Gmc

Field File No. 177-259-1A1

OO and File No. CE

Date 4/1/80

From

b6
b7C

Lynch Co. - S.O. -
(NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR)
(ADDRESS OF CONTRIBUTOR)

By

To Be Returned ☐ Yes

Receipt Given ☐ Yes

☒ No

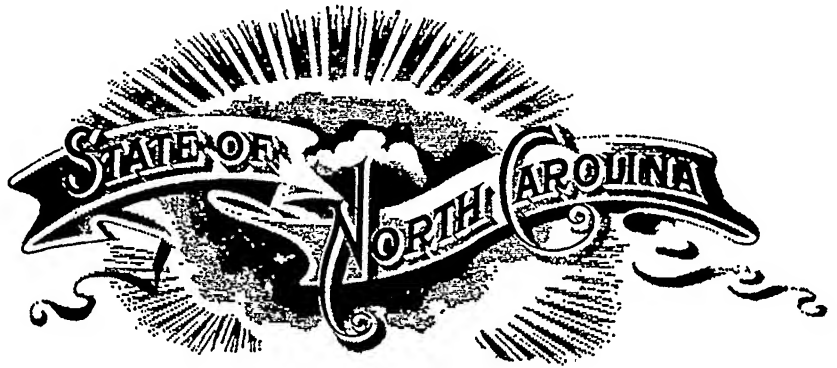
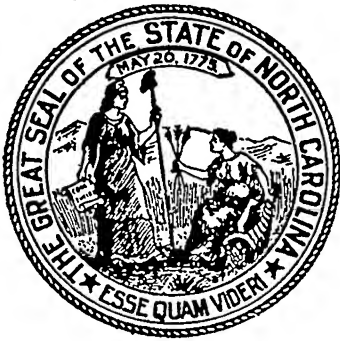
☒ No

Description:

Copy of judgement
order re Griffin

b6
b7C

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 8/28/84 BY SP2TAP/alt



LINCOLN

County

Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court

I, PAMELA C. HUSKEY, DEPUTY, Clerk of the Superior Court of
LINCOLN County, State of North Carolina, said Court being
a Court of Record, having an official seal, which is hereto affixed,
do hereby certify the foregoing and attached (THREE sheets)
to be a true copy of Judgment and Commitment for
 80 CRS 278-Judgment and Commitment for Virgil Lee Griffin;
 Judgment and Commitment for

b6
b7c

as the same is taken from and compared with the original now on
file in this office.

In Witness Whereof, I hereunto subscribe my name and affix the
seal of the Superior Court of LINCOLN County, at my
office in LINCOLNTON, North Carolina, this 2nd day of
APRIL, 19 80.

Deputy

Clerk Superior Court
Ex Officio Judge of Probate

SEAL

COUNTY of Lincoln

The State of North Carolina

vs.

FILM #

IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE

Superior Court Division

Virgil Lee Griffin 35 M/W

Name, Age, Sex and Race of Defendant

JUDGMENT AND COMMITMENT

In open court, the defendant appeared for trial upon the charge or charges of Aid & Abet
in placing burning cross on private property

and thereupon (entered) (~~tendered~~) a plea of guilty as charged

Having

pled

guilty of the

offense(s) of aid & abet placing burning cross on private property

which (is) (~~was~~) a violation(s) of G.S. 14-12.12
felony

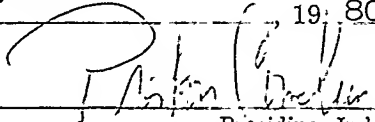
and of the grades(s) of

It is ADJUDGED that the defendant be imprisoned for the term of Not less than 1 year
nor more than 3 years in the common jail of Lincoln County. It appears to
the Court, however, that the defendant is eligible and is a fit subject for
special probation under G.S. 15A-1351; therefore, it is ordered that the
defendant shall serve an active sentence of 6 months in the Lincoln County
Jail and the remainder of the sentence of 2 years and 6 months shall be
suspended and the defendant is to be placed on supervised probation for 2
years and 6 months under the following conditions: 1. Defendant to report
to his probation officer within 72 hours upon his release from custody; 2.
Pay Court cost, jail fees and supervision fees; 3. Obey the rules and
regulations of the detention center governing the conduct of inmates; 4.
Court recommends work release privileges so defendant can maintain employment
and support his dependants; 5. Not associate with any person convicted of
a felony; 6. Not possess any firearm or deadly weapon in violation of the
General Statutes of N.C.; 7. Obey a curfew of 11:00 p.m. each night unless
with his wife or in the course of his employment; 8. Not violate any laws
of the State regarding the intimidation statute; 9. Be and remain of good
behavior and violate no laws of the State; 10. Not contact, go upon the
~~the defendant is entitled to speak for~~ ~~the defendant is entitled to speak for~~
property of, harass or threaten the Defendant to surrender
himself at 5:00 p.m. on April 1, 1980.

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It is ORDERED that the Clerk deliver two certified copies of this Judgment and Commitment to
the Sheriff or other qualified officer and that said officer cause the defendant to be delivered, with
such copies as commitment authority, to the appropriate official of the State Department of Correction.
"The maximum sentence of imprisonment allowed by law for the longest
of the above-identified offense is 5 years."

This 31st day of March, 1980.


Presiding Judge

Preston Cornelius

NOTE: Restitution and Reparation. When an active sentence is imposed, the court is required to consider whether restitution or reparation to an aggrieved party should be ordered or recommended as a condition of parole or of attaining work release privileges. If the court determines that restitution should not be ordered or recommended, the court should so indicate. If the court determines that restitution should be ordered or recommended, it should make its order or recommendation a part of this judgment and commitment. G.S. 148-33.2 (c); 148-57.1 (c) (Continued on Reverse)

Attorney for Defendant:

Attorney for the State:

Date certified copies of judgment delivered to Sheriff for commitment:

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b7C

APPEAL ENTRIES

In apt time, the defendant objects and excepts to the rulings and judgment of the court and gives notice of appeal to the

Further notice waived.

The defendant is allowed _____ days to prepare and serve the proposed record on appeal, and the State is allowed _____ days after such service to serve objections, amendments, or proposed alternative record on appeal.

Appearance bond is fixed in the sum of \$_____.

Appeal bond is set at \$_____.

This _____ day of _____, 19_____.

Presiding Judge

CERTIFICATION TO DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

I certify that this document is a true and complete copy of the original Judgment and Commitment in the case named, now on file in this office, and that this copy is certified to the North Carolina State Department of Correction, as in said judgment directed, as authority for the execution of the prison sentence therein imposed.

Witness my hand and the seal of the Superior Court

This _____ day of _____, 19_____.

Deputy Clerk of the Superior Court

(Restitution and Reparation continued)

The ORDER of restitution or reparation incident to a commitment should be made only when there is a plea arrangement which includes a provision for defendant to make restitution. It should be noted in the commitment that restitution is ordered as a part of the plea arrangement. G.S. 15A-1021(d).

A RECOMMENDATION of restitution or reparation incident to a commitment may be made whether or not there is a plea arrangement.

The court is required to name the aggrieved party and to fix the manner of performing the restitution or reparation. G.S. 15-199(10).

Memorandum

TO : SAC (177-New) (P)

DATE: 1/18/80

FROM : SA [REDACTED]

b6
b7C

SUBJECT: VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN;

[REDACTED] VICTIMS
DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSINGALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 8/28/84 BY SP2 TAP/LLK

On 1/17/80 Bureau Supervisor [REDACTED] requested that a Discrimination in Housing case be opened concerning the possible violation of the Fair Housing Provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Specifically, Discrimination in Housing as regards the cross burning in front of a home in Lincolnton on the night of 1/15/80 involving VIRGIL GRIFFIN and [REDACTED]

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Supervisor [REDACTED] advised that the DIH violation could ensue from: (1) If the owners were black, or (2) If they are white and have decided to sell their home and a realtor has shown the residence to blacks.

He was advised that a newspaper article appearing in the "Charlotte Observer" on 1/17/80 described the owners as being [REDACTED] and that they were white.

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He advised that investigation should be conducted in accordance with provisions MIOG, Section 177, as covered in pages 815-830, and that basically our investigation would be to interview the victims to determine all circumstances concerning this matter and any ensuing racial aspects thereof and whether they have in fact planned to sell their home to blacks, which may have precipitated the cross burning.

The subjects should also be interviewed and selective neighborhood investigation should be conducted in the area of the residence to determine if there are any witnesses to the cross burning and whether they can provide any reasons for it. Also PD records should be reviewed and results of their investigation should be ascertained.

MMG:jnr
(2)

SEARCHED	INDEXED
SERIALIZED	FILED
JAN 18 1980	
[REDACTED]	

b6
b7C

Buy U.S. Savings Bonds Regularly on the Payroll Savings Plan

See Attached Search Slip

MUST BE IN
DICTATIONBY 2/5/80
Bureau 2/8/80

100-12212
174-627
44-3527-5122
[Handwritten initials and marks]

177-259

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Cross burning charged to Grand Dragon Griffin

LINCOLNTON (AP) — Virgil Griffin, grand dragon of the North Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, was arrested Tuesday night in connection with a cross burning in Lincoln County.

Griffin, 35, was charged with reckless driving and aiding and abetting in a cross burning. He was released shortly after the incident under \$5,000 bond.

Lincoln County Detective L.C. Underwood said an off-duty prison guard was on his way home when he saw two men run to a car after setting fire to a cross on the lawn of William and Diane Ingle,

near Boger City. He radioed a REACT team for help, and it notified Lincoln County and city police officers, who took Griffin and Mark Jeffrey Sherer into custody.

Underwood said Griffin was driving the car.

He said officers confiscated two .44-caliber pistols, a sawed-off shotgun and a .22-caliber automatic rifle. Underwood said all the weapons were loaded and that there were boxes of ammunition in the car.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

Page 1
Section A

Greensboro Record

Greensboro, N.C.

Date: 1-16-80

Edition:
Evening

Title:

Character:

or

Classification:

Submitting Office

SEARCHED 3527 INDEXED
SERIALIZED 67 FILED 11

JAN 1980

FBI-CHARLOTTE

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FBI/DOJb7C

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 8/28/84 BY SP2 TSP/kut

1cc 100-12212

1cc 100-12217

1cc 44-3527

1cc 100-259 (SHERER)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Charlotte, North Carolina

January 30, 1980

In Reply, Please Refer to
File No.

VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN;

[REDACTED]

VICTIM

- VICTIM

DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING MATTER

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At approximately 8:40 p.m. on January 15, 1980,
a cross was burned in the front yard of the residence of

[REDACTED]

An off duty North Carolina Department of Corrections
(NCDC) Officer drove by as an individual was running from the
burning cross and entering an automobile parked nearby. This
officer recognized the man entering the vehicle as [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The NCDC employee pursued the vehicle from the
scene and alerted local authorities by radio. A few minutes
later the vehicle was stopped by law enforcement officers.

The vehicle was being driven by VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN,
white male, born February 27, 1944, a resident of Gaston County,
North Carolina. GRIFFIN is the self-proclaimed Grand Dragon of
the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, in North
Carolina.

[REDACTED] was also in the vehicle. [REDACTED]
is a white male, born [REDACTED]

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Also located in the automobile, which was registered
to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was charged by Lincoln County, North Carolina,
authorities with burning a cross on the land of [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] both
of which are felonies in the State of North Carolina.

4-Bureau
1-Charlotte
(177-259)
CBW:lct
(5)

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SERIALIZED FILED

177-259-14
[REDACTED]

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ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 6/12/04 BY SP2228/9

VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN:

[REDACTED]

VICTIM
- VICTIM

b6
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GRIFFIN was charged with aiding and abetting [REDACTED] in the cross burning, a felony, and also with careless and reckless driving.

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Both GRIFFIN and [REDACTED] have been released on bond and trial dates have not yet been set.

[REDACTED] who are both white, have advised that their residence [REDACTED] is not, and has not, been for sale. [REDACTED] initially advised local authorities that they could think of no reason why a cross would be burned in their yard; however, [REDACTED] was interviewed by an FBI agent at Lincolnton, N.C., on January 21, 1980, at which time she stated that [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] stated that she has made statements to a number of people that [REDACTED] was "conned" into joining the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and going to Greensboro. She now feels that the cross burning in her yard was done as a result of these statements.

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DIRECTOR, FBI

1/30/80

SAC, CHARLOTTE (177-259) (C)

CHANGED:

VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN:

[REDACTED]

VICTIM:

[REDACTED]

VICTIM
DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING MATTER

(OO: CHARLOTTE)

Title is marked changed to fully identify subject

[REDACTED]

Re telcall from FBI headquarters, 1/17/80, requesting that a DIH case be opened concerning possible violation of Fair Housing Provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, concerning the burning of a cross at Lincolnton, N.C., on 1/15/80.

Enclosed for the Bureau are original and three copies of an LHM setting forth facts in captioned matter.

As revealed in enclosed LHM, [REDACTED] victims in this matter, are both white. [REDACTED] has been interviewed at Lincolnton, N.C., on 1/21/80, at which time she stated that their residence is not and has not been for sale. She stated further that she believes the reason a cross was burned in the yard is due to the fact that she made statements to the effect that [REDACTED] was "conned" into joining the Klan and going with Klan members to Greensboro, N.C.

- 2 - Bureau (Encs. 4)
(4) - Charlotte (1 - 177-259)
(1 - 100-12217)
(1 - 100-12212)
(1 - 44-2527)

CBW:lct
(6)

lct

6/12/84
SP2AP/ep
177-259-5
[REDACTED]

CE 177-259

It should be noted that [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] stated that she believes that her remarks about [REDACTED] and the Klan had gotten back to Klan members and this precipitated the cross burning incident at her residence.

Also, as stated in enclosed LHM, felony charges have been filed against both GRIFFIN and [REDACTED] in Lincoln County, N.C., in connection with the cross burning incident.

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In view of the above, it does not appear that there is any violation of the discrimination in housing provisions of the Civil Rights Act and no further investigation is being conducted concerning this matter by the Charlotte Division.

Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation

MAR 1 1980

Drew S. Days, III
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division

DSD:LKD:MDJ:bbg
DJ 175-55-74

Virgil Lee Griffin;



Victim
- Victim

Discrimination in Housing
CIVIL RIGHTS

b6
b7C

Reference is made to your memorandum dated February 25, 1980, enclosing a copy of a letterhead memorandum dated January 30, 1980 at Charlotte.

Please monitor the local prosecution and keep us apprised.

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 8/28/84 BY SP/MP/awt

177-254-6

MAR 10 1980

DATE CHANGED BY

[Redacted box]

[Signature]

b6
b7C

TRANSMIT VIA: Airtel

PRECEDENCE: _____

CLASSIFICATION: _____

DATE: 3/7/80

To: SAC, Charlotte (177-259)

From: Director, FBI

VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN;

[REDACTED]

aka

[REDACTED]

- VICTIM

[REDACTED]

- VICTIM

DIH

ReCElet to the Bureau dated 1/30/80.

Enclosed for Charlotte are two copies of a self-explanatory Departmental letter dated 3/5/80, for information.

Follow local prosecution and report when finalized or furnish status LHM within 30 days, whichever occurs first.

Enc. 2

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OO: Charlotte

177-259-7

(Do not type below this line.)

MAR 10 1980

FBI - CHARLOTTE

[REDACTED]

w/serial 445

Re O/A

8/29/84

SP27/alt

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION*Memorandum*

TO : SAC, CHARLOTTE (177-259) (P)

DATE: 3/19/80

FROM : SA [REDACTED]

b6
b7CSUBJECT: VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN:
ET AL
DIH

(OO: CHARLOTTE)

Re Bureau airtel to Charlotte, 3/7/80.

On 3/17/80, records of the Clerk of Court, Lincoln County, N. C., were checked concerning status of prosecution against subjects GRIFFIN and [REDACTED]. The Deputy Clerk of Court advised that this case is set for trial in Superior Court, Lincoln County, N. C., on 3/24/80.

b6
b7CLEADS:CHARLOTTE:AT LINCOLNTON, N. C.

Will follow and report prosecution of subjects.

(2) - Charlotte

CBW:kcl
(2) *ll*

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 8/28/84 BY SP2TAP/aw

177-259-8

SEARCHED	INDEXED
SERIALIZED	FILED
MAR 19 1980	
FBI - CHARLOTTE	

[REDACTED]

b6
b7C



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Charlotte, North Carolina

March 3, 1980

In Reply, Please Refer to
File No.

VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN:

known as

VICTIM:

also

- VICTIM

DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING MATTER

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Records of the Clerk of Court, Lincoln County, Lincolnton, North Carolina, revealed that on March 31, 1980, subject [redacted] entered a plea of guilty to placing a burning cross on private property, a violation of North Carolina General Statute 14-12.12, a felony.

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The sentencing judge ordered that [redacted] should serve an active sentence of six months in the Department of Corrections and the remainder of two years and six months should be suspended and he should be placed on supervised probation for this period of time under the following special conditions:

1. The defendant report to his probation officer within 72 hours upon release from custody.

2. Obey the rules and regulations of the Department of Corrections governing the conduct of inmates.

3. Not trespass upon the property of or contact the [redacted]

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4-Bureau

④ Charlotte

(1-177-259)

(1-100-12217)

(1-100-12212)

(1-44-2527)

CBW:lct

(8)

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HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED

DATE 6/12/84 BY SP2/PLW

SEARCHED
SERIALIZED

INDEXED
FILED

177-259-9

[redacted]

OK

VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN:

VICTIM;
- VICTIM

b6
b7C

4. Not possess a firearm or deadly weapon in violation of the General Statutes of North Carolina.

5. Not associate with any person convicted of a felony.

6. Pay supervision fee.

7. Obey a curfew of 11 p.m. each night unless with his parent or in the course of employment.

8. Not participate in any activity of placing a cross on the property of another.

9. Not participate in any intimidating activities, as set forth in North Carolina General Statute 14-12.13.

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On March 31, 1980, subject VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN entered a plea of guilty to aiding and abetting the placing of a burning cross on private property, a felony in violation of North Carolina General Statute 14-12.12.

GRIFFIN was sentenced to not less than one year nor more than three years in the common jail of Lincoln County, North Carolina.

GRIFFIN was ordered to serve an active sentence of six months and the remainder of the sentence of two years and six months be suspended and the defendant placed on supervised probation for two years and six months under the following conditions:

1. Defendant to report to his probation officer within 72 hours upon his release from custody.

VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN:

[REDACTED] VICTIM;
- VICTIM

b6
b7C

2. Pay court costs, jail fees and supervision fees.
3. Obey rules and regulations of the Detention Center governing the conduct of inmates.
4. Court recommends work release privileges so defendant can maintain employment and support dependants.
5. Not associate with any person convicted of a felony.
6. Not possess any firearm or deadly weapon in violation of the General Statutes of North Carolina.
7. Obey a curfew of 11 p.m. each night unless with his wife or in the course of his employment.
8. Not violate any laws of the state regarding the intimidation statute.
9. Be and remain on good behavior and violate no laws of the state.
10. Not contact, go upon the property of, harass or threaten the [REDACTED]

b6
b7C

XX AIRTEL

4/3/80

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI
FROM: SAC, CHARLOTTE (177-259) (C)
SUBJECT: VIRGIL LEE GRIFFIN;
[REDACTED] aka
[REDACTED]
VICTIM: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] - VICTIM
DIH
(OO: CHARLOTTE)

b6
b7C

Re Charlotte letter to Bureau, 1/30/80; and Bureau airtel to Charlotte, 3/7/80.

Enclosed is original and three copies of an LHM setting forth results of prosecution of subjects by the State of North Carolina in Lincoln County, N.C.

2 - Bureau (Encs. 4)
④ - Charlotte (1 - 177-259)
(1 - 100-12217)
(1 - 100-12212)
(1 - 44-2527)

CBW:lct
(6)

lct

Chab
P

177-259-10
f
[REDACTED] *OK*

b6
b7C

8/22/84

SP2 [signature]

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)
GREENSBORO DAILY NEWS
 Greensboro, N.C. Pg.1
 Date: 5-2-83

Date:
 Edition:

Title:

Character:
 or
 Classification:
 Submitting Office: CE

Indexing:

Klan Link Didn't Fit Quiet Guy

By LARRY KING
 Staff Writer

CRAMERTON — The photo was just a Polaroid snapshot, but 16-year-old Mark Sherer seemed proud enough of it.

It showed Sherer, a baby-faced high school kid, standing beside the Cramerton Volunteer Fire Department engine. The white of his Ku Klux Klan robe was starkly clear against the shiny red paint of the fire engine.



Sherer

"He liked to show it. I guess maybe Mark associated the two," says Nathaniel Wiggins, a high school friend of Sherer's who served with him in the fire department. "It's like that was what he was all about, the fire department and the Klan."

The fire department and the Klan. Public service and private hatred.

It just didn't fit, say people in Cramerton, the small Gaston County textile mill town — about 20 miles due west of Charlotte — where Sherer grew up. Local folks say little that's happened to Mark Sherer since that six-year-old picture was taken has made much sense.

Since then, he's been convicted of an armed robbery near Charlotte and a Klan-related cross-burning in Lincoln County.

But what gained Sherer lasting notoriety came Nov. 3, 1979, in Greensboro, more than 100 miles east of his hometown.

On that day, Sherer fired the first shot in a bloody confrontation that left five an-

Name Jeffrey Sherer

HS-15

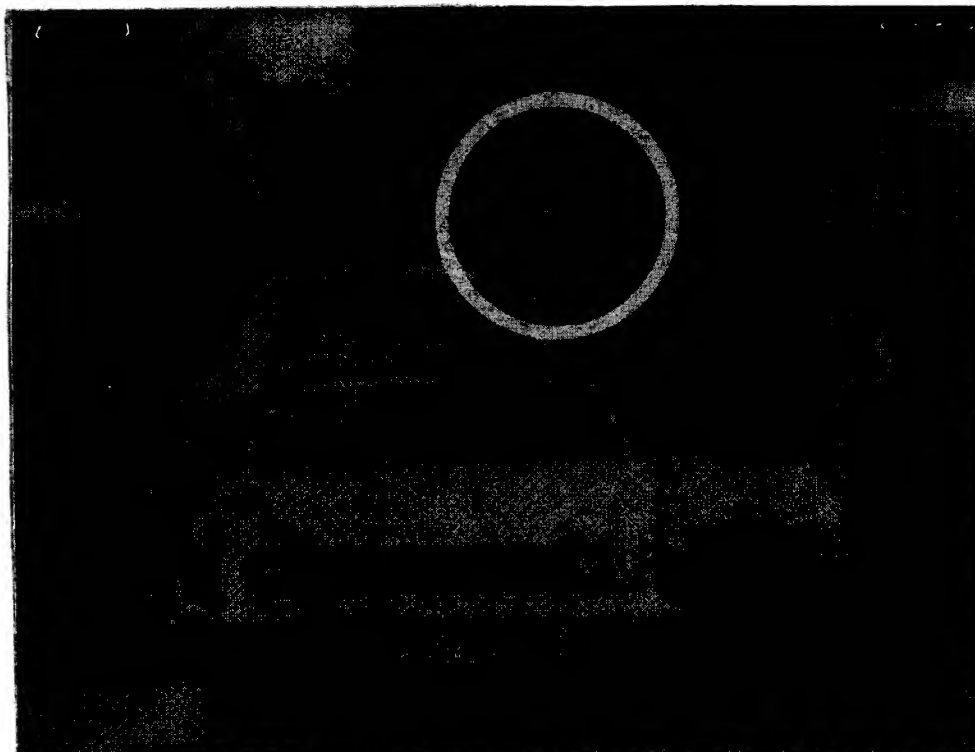
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Sherer, encircled, leans from lead caravan vehicle

Photos taken from videotapes of Nov. 3, 1979, shootings

ti-Klan demonstrators dead and eight other people injured.

State prosecutors failed to gain convictions in the case. But on April 21, a federal grand jury indicted nine Klansmen and Nazis on civil rights charges related to the shootings.

At the same time, government officials also revealed that Sherer, now 22, quietly had pleaded guilty a month earlier to a conspiracy charge in connection with the shootings. His sentencing has been postponed indefinitely, typically a tip-off that a defendant is cooperating with prosecutors.

Sherer is expected to testify for the government when the case against the nine goes to trial later this year.

The nine defendants are scheduled for arraignment this morning in Winston-Salem.

After the grand jury's action, Sherer

had been one of the lesser-known participants in the Nov. 3 melee. But his testimony could play a crucial role in the government's case.

Sherer was closely involved with Klansmen who, according to the indictments, played key roles in planning the Nov. 3 clash and in escaping afterward. Both of those aspects figure prominently in the federal indictments.

But people in Cramerton, like those in Greensboro, know very little about Sherer's role in North Carolina's worst instance of Klan-related violence.

What they do know baffles them.

"Mark was basically a quiet, intelligent, clean-cut guy, so what's he doing getting mixed up in a group like the Klan?" asks Cramerton Police Chief David Young.

(See Sherer, A6)

To fishing and others in Cramerton, it never will fit

Above all, Cramerton is a restful, rolling and pretty town, its easy pace consistent with the sluggish flow of the Catawba River's south fork

The town and its 1,850 people are at once cradled against the river's muddy arm and a towering green hill — "the Mountain," residents call it — on which the Cramer family long ago built a 28-room mansion.

Huddled closely are what were once Cramer-owned mill houses and company stores, still largely stocked with now-retired textile workers. They're the ones who stayed after the Cramers sold their three mills to Burlington Industries around World War II.

What few blacks there are in Cramerton live together on the town's outskirts in a 20- to 30-home section known as Baltimore.

Mark Sherer grew up in the western end of Cramerton, apparently wanting little to do with Baltimore.

"We'd go out a couple times a year, checking the hydrants, you know, greasing the valves," says Wiggins. "When we got to Baltimore, Mark wouldn't even get off the truck. I'd say, 'Come on, let's get to it,' and he said, 'I believe I'm fine right where I am.'"

The youngest of three children, Sherer was close to his father. Harmon Eugene Sherer was a pipefitter with a seventh-grade education who died suddenly of a heart attack when Mark was 11.

"It right near drove him crazy. He worshipped his daddy," says George Sherer, his uncle who lives across the street from the house where Mark lives with his mother and step-father. He said Mark has a job with a Dallas, N.C., plumbing shop.

One of Sherer's prize possessions was an operable Japanese rifle his father had given him.

"He was all right," says Dee Dee Rhinehart, a neighbor who grew up with Sherer. "We'd go out and play war. I can remember when we were little, he'd ask if we wanted to play with real guns. Unloaded, though. He had a lot of guns. It seemed to be his main interest."

Wiggins remembers that Sherer was friendly with those he knew well, but "he wasn't the sociable-type person. He was one of the people who was real quiet, didn't try to make friends or speak to people."

Trying to draw Sherer out of his shell, Wiggins says, he encouraged Sherer to join the volunteer fire department when he turned 16.

It was about then that Sherer also joined the Ku Klux Klan. Vigil Griffin of nearby Mount Holly, a Klan grand dragon, supposedly approached several South Point High School students like Sherer about that time.

Griffin, who is now under indictment for the Nov. 3 shootings, heads the Invisible Empire Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and has long been known for his militancy.

"I think that Griffin talked him into it," George Sherer says. "He was just straight as an arrow until that Griffin came along."

"Our information was that he followed Griffin around like a puppy dog," says James Coman, a Guilford County assistant district attorney who helped prosecute the 1980 Klan-Nazi murder trial in Greensboro.

Sherer is consistently described as always well-dressed and neatly groomed, a bright high school student who made his grades, who sometimes tutored younger students and who regularly went to church. In recent years, he has pursued a college degree, chalking up B-minus marks in liberal arts and English studies.

Yet he reveled in the Klan, whose members often are stereotyped as sporting dirty fingernails, greasy pompadours and soiled blue jeans; an organization that's long on high school dropouts and short on conventional logic.

Despite Sherer's natural reticence, he found in Griffin's Klan a cause that filled him with enough audacity to try recruiting Police Chief Young.

"He carried a briefcase a lot at the fire department. He had some Klan literature, but it seemed like he also had books on the Nazi party and about Hitler," says Young, who doubles as assistant fire chief. "That was when I first learned he was involved with the KKK."

"He said one time that I ought to join. We were sitting in the driveway at my house," Young says. "He said, 'If we can just get eight or

nine people in the Klan, we can start our own chapter in Cramerton.

But he won no known converts, Young says.

Sherer's recruiting ended in late 1977, after he and two friends sawed the ends off two rifles and robbed a convenience store near Charlotte. They were arrested, and Sherer pleaded guilty.

"I asked him what made him do a thing like that," Young says. "He said it was just something to do."

After serving less than a year in prison, Sherer returned to Cramerton, to the volunteer fire department and to the Klan.

But it wasn't long until Griffin's Klan was making plans to confront Communist demonstrators in Greensboro.

According to federal indictments, Griffin was involved in seven of 15 overt acts that outline a conspiracy to violently disrupt the Communist Workers' Party's Nov. 3 "Death to the Klan" rally in Greensboro.

Prominent in these overt acts was Griffin's leadership in several Klan meetings in western North Carolina, which Sherer is known to have attended.

Griffin also is named in 11 overt acts that describe a conspiracy to silence or intimidate potential witnesses during the week after the shootings. Again, the indictments say Sherer was with Griffin during many of those acts.

Sherer didn't ride with Griffin to Greensboro on Nov. 3. But the indictments allege that Griffin's car transported two guns belonging to Sherer to a Klan rendezvous point south of the city.

After assembling the morning of Nov. 3, Klansmen and Nazis piled into nine vehicles and were led to the CWP rally by Greensboro police informant Edward Dawson. Dawson is a former Klansman who also is named as a defendant in the federal indictments.

When the caravan passed the CWP demonstrators, taunts and fighting erupted. In his guilty plea, Sherer admits leaning out of a truck at the front of the caravan, firing a shot into the air with his .44-caliber pistol, and "exhort(ing) the Klansmen and Nazis to shoot the 'niggers'."

The shot was the first in a series of gunfire that killed the five victims. Sherer also has told law enforcement officers that he fired a second shot into an empty, parked school bus before the truck he was riding in fled the scene.

"I saw the news that night and watched closely, because my parents used to live in Greensboro," Young remembers. "When I saw Mark's face go by in one of those (Klan-Nazi) cars, I nearly fell out of my chair. I was really shocked."

But Sherer's role in the incident didn't end there.

According to the indictments, Sherer re-joined Griffin and several Klan associates later that day in Lincoln County. Then they traveled to a cabin near Boone owned by Sherer's parents, where the group spent the night.

The indictments say that Griffin, during his stay at the cabin, deliberately led to three members of the group about where he would hide from law enforcement officials during the next few days.

Griffin also is accused of telling members of the group to "remember their Ku Klux Klan oath" and not provide information about Klan members to investigators. He ordered the group, including Sherer, to lie about what they knew about the shootings, the indictments say.

Griffin and two others, including Sherer, then fled to Camden, S.C., to avoid arrest, the charges state.

Griffin and Sherer were questioned later but not immediately charged.

Two months later, in mid-January 1980, Griffin and Sherer burned a cross in the yard of a Lincoln County woman near Boger City. According to law enforcement officers, the woman had criticized the Klan's role in the Nov. 3 shootings.

Griffin and Sherer were convicted of the cross-burning and sent to prison. Sherer was paroled in 1981.

Sherer has refused repeatedly to talk to reporters, and immediate family members shield him from interviews. "Nothing for publication," says his mother, Marie Watts. "We're not going to say anything."

Meanwhile, Sherer's former friends in Cramerton say they hope his cooperation with authorities signals that Sherer is leaving his Klan days behind.

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